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TAGS: MARR PREL PGOV MASS MOPS I2

SUBJECT: PM CHIEF OF STAFF ABDALLAH TELLS AMBASSADOR GOI
WILL CONTINUE BASRA MILITARY OPERATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Ambassador met March 30 with Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff Tariq Abdallah to counsel the GOI to add political and economic measures to its military efforts in Basra. He also expressed concern that the PM's decision to pursue operations to take control of Umm Qasr port had not been planned in detail. Abdallah responded that Moqtadah al Sadr's statement released March 30 indicated the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were succeeding. End Summary.

We're Winning

¶2. (S) After initial pleasantries, Abdallah told Ambassador that the situation for ISF's operations in Basra was much improved. He noted that U.S. help, in particular air support, had made a significant difference. He reported that the PM believes the March 30 statement by Moqtadah al-Sadr telling his followers to "end all armed appearances in the provinces of Basra and other provinces" signals the weakness of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) forces. He expressed conviction that in three to four days, the situation will be vastly improved for Iraqi troops.

¶3. (S) Ambassador acknowledged that Sadr's statement was a good step; a statement in response from the PM's spokesman was also a good step. Together, they could be the beginning of a resolution to the situation in Basra and re-establishing a divide between the bulk of the Sadr movement and the Special Group Criminals. Actions this week in Basra and Baghdad reveal that this division has disappeared. Recent action has reunited the whole Sadr trend. While there has been less violence in the last twenty-four hours, we link it to the reduced activity of ISF.

Umm Qasr

¶4. (S) In response to Ambassador's question, Abdallah said that the ISF would take action March 31 to assert control over Umm Qasr port. Ambassador noted this was a major undertaking and questioned whether planning in detail for the operation had been done, adding that General Petraeus had raised this issue with National Security Advisor (NSA) Muwaffaq Rubaie, pointing out that MNF-I would not seek to take control of Umm Qasr without extensive planning. Ambassador pointed out the likely difficulties in moving ISF from Basra thirty kilometers to Umm Qasr, exposing them to IEDs and ambushes. He added that senior U.S. officers were now in Basra to help with planning.

¶5. (S) In response, Abdallah noted that he had heard the Embassy and MNF-I thought the GOI had underestimated the situation in Basra, and now the same perception about GOI efforts towards Umm Qasr were being expressed. He declared

our evaluation incorrect. Success in Basra and Umm Qasr will bring a positive psychological change. Nonetheless, he promised to convey our views to the PM.

Pol-Econ Efforts Required

¶ 16. (S) General Petraeus was committed to providing coordinated air and logistics support, but he and Ambassador did not foresee a military victory -- economic and political efforts are needed. Ambassador drew Abdallah's attention to Sadr's statement as evidence of political elements coming into play. He noted that he had told the PM that using surplus funds to provide jobs to thousands of Basrawis almost immediately would take them off the street for necessary projects in Basra. The PM could also use funds with tribal leaders to help the situation. Many possibilities exist to demonstrate success. Closing on this point, Ambassador told Abdallah that, "we are in this together; the PM's success is success for all of us and success for Iraq."

A Sadrist by any other name

¶ 17. (S) After stating that he agreed in principle with Ambassador's points, Abdallah said that a political solution would not work with these groups. He alleged that they have no political vision, only banners and slogans to attract the people, but no program. Many are former Baathists, he insisted, who lie and use ridiculous pretexts to abort discussions.

¶ 18. (S) He agreed that economics is of paramount importance, adding that some have joined the Sadrist due to lack of

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jobs, but opposed giving jobs wholesale to former fighters who would sabotage the projects they worked on. He re-stated his belief that use of force will resolve the situation.

¶ 19. (S) Abdallah added that the Sadrist employ tough tactics -- they intimidate the ISF officers and other personnel through threats against their family members. They will stop at nothing, he insisted, to intimidate the ISF. The Sadrist and the Special Groups are different faces of the same group controlled by a single hand, who assigns each a role.

¶ 10. (S) Ambassador reiterated his view that there are differences within the Sadrist movement. There are reconcilables and irreconcilables, and, in fighting Al Qaeda, we all had had success in getting many of the militia elements to stand down. It would be better to have to fight only those who were determined on violence. Abdallah replied that he hoped the Ambassador's view reflected reality, but opined that the Sadrist were playing tricks. Ambassador insisted that regardless of the reality of the Sadrist, it benefited us to try to divide them.

Peshmerga

¶ 11. (S) Ambassador asked about reports that President Talibani had offered Peshmerga forces to come to Baghdad to support ISF. Smiling, Abdallah said that Talibani had offered MOD forces but also to send Peshmerga. MOD forces will be used for law enforcement; the Peshmerga proposal is under study. Regardless of whether they are used, the offer of Peshmerga by Talibani is a good sign, the Ambassador stated.

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